

Barth Society met in Philadelphia November 18-19, 2005

Our meeting in Philadelphia featured a Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were **Mike Michielin**, Wycliffe College, Cobourg Campus, Canada, who spoke on the subject of "Exegesis That Corresponds to God's Activity" and **Edwin Chr. Van Driel**, Yale University, who spoke on the subject of "Karl Barth on the Eternal Being of Jesus Christ". The Saturday morning session featured a panel discussion of **Mike Higton's** *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (T & T Clark, 2004) and was chaired by **George Hunsinger** of Princeton Theological Seminary. The panel participants were: **Mike Higton**, University of Exeter; **Jason Springs**, Princeton University and **Katherine Sonderegger**, Virginia Theological Seminary. Summaries of the papers presented at the November meeting will follow the announcement of the first annual **Karl Barth Conference**.

"THY WORD IS TRUTH"

Reading Scripture Theologically with Karl Barth

KARL BARTH CONFERENCE

Sunday, May 21 to Wednesday, May 24, 2006

Princeton Theological Seminary

Princeton, NJ

Speakers:

A. Katherine Grieb

Virginia Theological Seminary

George Hunsinger

Princeton Theological Seminary

Paul Dafydd Jones

Harvard University

Paul D. Molnar

St. John's University

John Webster

University of Aberdeen

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The Program will begin with registration on Sunday, May 21 at 2 P.M. and will feature an opening banquet at 6 P.M. with an after-dinner talk at 7:30 P.M. **John Webster** and **A. Katherine Grieb** will speak on Monday. **Paul Dafydd Jones** and **Paul Molnar** will speak on Tuesday and **George Hunsinger** will speak on Wednesday morning. The program will end at noon on Wednesday.

A brochure listing the detailed schedule is **enclosed in this mailing**. We hope that as many as possible will be able to register and attend this conference which promises to be both important and interesting.

What follows are summaries of the papers presented at the November meeting.

Maico Michielin

"Exegesis That Corresponds to God's Activity"

Michielin began noting that he chose to focus on Barth's *Shorter Commentary on Romans* because it is what he calls straightforward exegesis. Unlike his exegesis in his commentaries on Romans and the *Church Dogmatics*, he believes Barth's sole interest here is to interpret the Bible.

Shorter Romans was first published in 1959 and originated from lectures given in 1940-41. Michielin notes that Adolf Jülicher, then Dean of New Testament studies in Germany, called Barth a "pneumatic" and characterized his exegesis as "unscientific" even though Barth's main intention was to let Paul speak for himself. Michielin's goal was to see if Barth's *Shorter Romans* is genuine exegesis.

By focusing on the election of humanity in Christ, on Paul as witness and Christians themselves as witnesses, Barth was able to stress that God is not some mathematical equation but one who is alive and active as Lord of the covenant.

First, it is noted that both Greek and Jew are condemned for attempting to fulfill the Law because the Law is already fulfilled in Christ. Just as God condemned Jesus to die on the Cross to elect him, so he condemns us in Christ's death in order to elect us. This election is both realized and manifested in Paul who lived as a servant of Christ. Paul's witness is effective only because of God's ongoing election. This is an election of grace and so Paul cannot possess and distribute it at will. Barth is careful to distinguish Jesus and Paul because he intends to show that it is Jesus and not Paul who actually elects other Christians. Michielin reminds us that Paul's ministry was not limited to the Gentiles but included a remnant of Jews and Paul himself so that Paul believed that Israel too can look forward with eschatological certainty that Jews are God's elect.

According to Michielin, Paul's text functioned as witness in two ways. First, it is a human and historical word of Paul and in that sense readers must pay attention to its literal meaning. As a human communication Barth therefore reads it historically. Second, it is precisely as this historically contingent word of Paul that the text functions as witness to God's own electing activity within history. By directing us to God's own activity the text becomes an instrument of God's electing activity.

For Barth then, the Bible is a human document like any other. Barth takes seriously the literal sense of the text because he believes "there is no distinction between the thinking and speaking of Paul and his writing". "What Paul says" is the same thing as saying "what the text says". Michielin believes a particularly striking example of this thinking can be seen in Barth's exegesis of Rom. 15:19 where Barth speaks of Paul's own amazement and wonder expressed in Rom. 9-11 of the Gospel "bursting forth" "out of the narrowness of Israel into the vast space of the Gentile world" as something that illustrates how Paul "speaks and writes as though God's mercy has become a reality to him". Close attention to the text therefore discloses the type of thought presented by Paul.

Importantly, then, Barth was no enemy of historical criticism and was perfectly willing to reject the proposal of some that chapter 16 was originally part of Ephesians because of overwhelming textual evidence to the contrary. He did not think Rom. 16:25-27 was originally part of the epistle based on his own and other historical analysis of the text. And Barth's historical information led him to contextualize Paul's writing by noting the kind of audience (largely from the eastern part of the empire) that Paul addressed and the kind of person he was (controversial and argumentative) which led Barth to

conclude that he wrote his letter to deflect attention away from his personality and toward the Gospel.

According to Michielin Barth's historical critical work does not go very deep especially in connection with Barth's consideration of the Law. Barth adopted the dominant Lutheran view that salvation or justification was by grace alone whereas the Jewish view held that only obedience to the Law could lead to salvation. But, according to Michielin, Ernst Käsemann believed that there were elements of Paul's doctrine of grace in the Jewish teaching of the Law. Since Paul probably adopted elements regarding justification from the Jewish teaching, this "blocks from the beginning a Lutheran viewpoint where there is a fundamental antithesis between Paul and Judaism, Gospel and Law". In this view Paul did not oppose the Rabbinic teaching on justification in and of itself but rather taught that "since Jesus is the Messiah, our salvation and obedience stands in the presence and under the power of Christ, not the Law".

Paul of course is a witness to God's activity in history and so he sees himself as an instrument of that activity, as Barth says with respect to Rom. 15:18-19: "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me . . . by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God . . ." So Paul is a witness insofar as his words point to and participate in the miraculous work of God in Christ. Barth sees Paul as the link between the risen Christ and the world because Jesus himself is "the Lord of the Scriptures . . . who as such wants to speak to them [i.e. the Jews] with binding authority through the Scriptures".

To what extent then can Barth's exegesis be considered a human activity? For Barth, Christology alone offers us the proper view of humanity because, according to Rom. 5, "our life in Christ has ontological priority over our life in Adam". Both our justification and sanctification are God's work and not ours because it is the electing God who creates and reconciles us in Christ. While we are indeed self-determining agents, we are unable to orient ourselves toward God because we are sinners who can be oriented toward God only by grace and faith and through the Spirit. Christian life is what it is in virtue of God's mercy alone.

Michielin says that Barth's Christology only "seems" to suppress human activity altogether. Barth insists that those who hear the Gospel do not lose their individuality by their existence in Christ. Our existence resembles Christ's own resurrection as in Rom. 6:4: "just as Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life". The Christian life then is not "an imitation of the resurrection but a reflected image that corresponds, resembles or patterns itself after it". Life in Christ thus means Christians are

freed for covenant fellowship and can pattern their lives accordingly.

Michielin concludes that, like Calvin, Barth stayed close to the text to understand exactly what was there and that Barth is "an active, not passive interpreter of Scripture". His historical work opens to his understanding of the electing grace of God in Christ and to our own very human participation in covenant fellowship with God himself. Yet, Michielin leaves us with questions that he does not attempt to answer: 1) why was Jülicher critical of Barth if Barth was indeed sensitive to historical and human aspects of the Bible? 2) given Jülicher's criticism mentioned above, what is it about Barth's account of the reader that differs from Jülicher's or even an account offered by any contemporary reader? Michielin says that if Barth's exegesis is to bring biblical and theological interpretations of the Bible together today, "we must have an answer to these questions".

Edwin Chr. Van Driel

"Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ"

Van Driel began his paper noting that throughout the fourteen volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* there can be little doubt that the doctrine of election, namely, God's free decision to give himself to "what is not God" is a central theme.

This, however, involves the "notoriously puzzling claim" that Christ is not only the object but also the subject of election—puzzling because this suggests that Jesus existed not only in time but in eternity. What does Barth mean when he speaks of Christ's humanity "in the beginning with God"? There are two questions here: first, "how does Christ's presumed eternal existence relate to his existence in time?" and second, "if Christ is himself the electing God, what does this tell us about the divine being and identity?" Van Driel discusses four possible interpretations of Barth's notion of Christ's eternal being. The first two relate to the first question while the last two relate to the second. Only one view will prove to be helpful in interpreting Barth according to Van Driel.

The first interpretation was offered by Brunner and Berkouwer. They believed Barth had moved salvation history from time into eternity with the result that "It is not so much the life of the historical Jesus but of the eternal Jesus which we should heed". Brunner himself held that belief in the eternal pre-existence of the God-Man would compromise not only the incarnation as an event in history but history as a whole. And Berkouwer believed that within Barth's view everything was already

decided so that what happened in time was merely the revelation of what was already determined in eternity.

While Barth does indeed speak of the incarnation as eternal and of the events of Jesus' life as revealing things which had been previously determined, the critique offered by Brunner and Berkouwer misses two important points. First, for Barth revelation is not an event that follows divine election and self-giving; it is not the revelation of things previously determined, "but the revelation of God by way of God's self-presentation". Thus the incarnation expresses God's election which is both his self-revelation and self-giving to what is other than himself. It is the temporal actualization of God's eternal will. This makes no sense to Brunner and Berkouwer. Second, Brunner and Berkouwer do not grasp the role of time and history in Barth's thought because they suppose time and history are merely added on to an "all-decisive eternity". But Van Driel rejects this, saying that time for Barth is what makes possible the history of the covenant itself. "Eternity is the realm of God's initiatives, but time is the realm of humanity's response". While God elects humanity in eternity, it is only in time that humanity can elect God and because the main subject of this temporal act is Jesus himself, it is clear that salvation hinges on both forms of election—the eternal and temporal.

The second possible interpretation, seen at least in part in John Colwell's *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1989), is quite similar to the first. Responding to the critique implied in the readings of Brunner and Berkouwer this view sees "the eternal existence of Christ as a reflection of his earthly existence". While God relates to time in a threefold way by preceding, accompanying and following time, Barth's notion that God's eternity is his simultaneity eliminates any real distinction between past, present and future so that the events of Jesus' life in history are the same as his eternal existence as well. This implies that the ontological basis of election is to be found in the temporal events of Jesus' life. This would make room for the historical event of Jesus' life.

But, according to Van Driel, this reading does not take into account other aspects of Barth's thinking. While Barth does espouse God's pre-temporal, supra-temporal and post-temporal relation to time, he thinks of each differently. Hence, pre-temporally God elects and Christ exists logically and ontologically prior to his earthly existence; supra-temporally God preserves time; and post-temporally God judges time. And this view does not explain Barth's emphasis on the eternal Christ as the active subject of election—as electing God.

What these two interpretations show is that it is a mistake to understand election and Christ's eternal existence as overshadowing history or compromising

Jesus' historical existence and that Christ's identity cannot be understood from the perspective of time and history but must be understood in relation to the eternal God.

The third example given by Van Driel concerns the reading offered by Bruce L. McCormack in which McCormack claims that Barth's doctrine of election "revolutionizes our understanding of God". Since Christ is the subject of election therefore the Logos cannot be a mode or state of being above or prior to God's decision to become incarnate in history. Hence the *Logos asarkos* (the pre-incarnate Word) never actually existed in and for himself but only as *incarnandus*, i.e., as the Logos who would become incarnate. Any reference to what the Logos was prior to election for McCormack does not refer to a "temporal" prior but only to a "logical and ontological 'prior'". In Van Driel's words "If God is eternal, as previously discussed, there is no temporal differentiation in God. But there still might be a logical and ontological differentiation in the divine being". There are two other parts to McCormack's proposal. First, if the Logos was not always *incarnandus* how could God really enter time and be subjected to the limitations of human life without undergoing some ontological change? Second, how can we be sure that in the incarnation God is not just playing a role but that we really have to do with God himself? McCormack proposes that we think of God's being "as constituted by the eternal act of turning to humanity, constituted by the incarnation".

According to Van Driel, Barth did not believe the incarnation constituted the divine being but rather held that the divine being constituted the incarnation. God is free to enter time because he eternally exists as the kind of God he is. God can enter space because of his unique divine space and God can love us because he is love in himself and self-sufficiently. And all of this is understood in terms of God's trinitarian existence from all eternity. In other words, for Barth the Trinity precedes election and makes it possible. McCormack believes that Barth's thinking here needs to be corrected with the idea that God's triunity is grounded in his decision for the covenant. The trinitarian processions are not "natural" but "willed by God". McCormack believes his proposal differs from Hegel's because Hegel believed creation and reconciliation were necessary rather than free acts.

Van Driel compares McCormack's proposal to Barth's and finds that McCormack is unable to avoid the idea that creation is also essential to and constitutive of the divine being. "Therefore, if election is essential to God, then so is creation". While McCormack's starting point (will rather than nature) is different from Hegel's, Van Driel does not see how McCormack's thinking ends differently from Hegel's. Further, for Barth it is God's trinitarian nature and attributes which make election and

incarnation possible. So if election and incarnation logically and ontologically precede the trinitarian nature and attributes of God, what exactly is it that makes it possible for God to elect and to become incarnate? This leads to another problem: one might wonder not only what properties are in God himself, but what subject is it that precedes the divine choice? Van Driel notes that McCormack is aware of this problem and offers two solutions that, in Van Driel's view, are unworkable: 1) since God's decision is eternal it cannot be said to follow the divine subject as in a temporal sequence and 2) since God makes his decision for election in his first mode of being, when we speak of Jesus Christ as the subject of election we simply affirm the oneness of God in three modes of being. But the fact that the whole process begins with the first mode of being leads Van Driel to conclude that this decision precedes Jesus Christ and is thus located in a mode of being even more unknown than the *Logos asarkos*.

According to Van Driel, while the notion of divine self-constitution is "incoherent", McCormack's line of argument is not without ground because of ambiguities in Barth's own thought which Van Driel spells out in detail in order to say finally that when Barth says that "Jesus Christ is the subject of election" this should not be taken to mean that Barth believed that this act constitutes the divine being but that this statement must be seen in light of the fact that Jesus Christ is actually God in his movement towards us, the one who elects in his free grace. It is Van Driel's contention that Barth's doctrine of election "has no ontological consequences for the notions of immanent Trinity, *logos asarkos*, or God-in-and-for-Godself". Instead of locating these notions within God's pre-temporal eternity they should be located in Christology and anthropology. From here Van Driel summarizes how Barth's view of history and therefore of Jesus' history leads him to speak of the humiliation and exaltation of the Son of God and the Son of Man. The same thing applies to humanity. Van Driel notes that he is not certain that Barth wanted to replace the traditional view of Christ's divinity and humanity which was understood in the category of natures with one described in terms of history—but if that is what Barth wanted to do "he should not have wanted to". Nonetheless he says Barth was correct to say that Christ did not start out as a set of properties, powers and agency but rather as "the act and determination of the divine willing". But he and we do receive properties etc. at a particular point in time so that we may say history precedes nature as covenant precedes creation: "just as covenant needs creation for covenant to be possible, history needs nature. It needs agents and powers to respond to the preceding action of God in history".

Finally, according to Van Driel, Barth's view is helpful in showing that humanity must find its true meaning only outside itself in God and that any assessment of Barth's

proposal can only be made properly within the context of the metaphysics of the incarnation itself.

Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology

By Mike Higton

The Saturday morning session began with an opening statement by Mike Higton noting that he was dissatisfied with current appraisals of Hans Frei's work. Frei's question concerned Christology, faith and history. He was fascinated with Strauss and wanted to laugh at him because we know from faith that we need to pay attention to history but that Christians respond to Jesus in faith.

Jason Springs presented an overview of Frei's thinking noting that Frei himself had spoken to the Barth Society in 1954. He explained that Frei's thinking moved from purely intellectual writing to writing that was more sociologically aware because he wanted his theology to fit into a cultural linguistic framework. Frei was one who was constantly at work re-thinking his theology. His basic method demonstrated that he was concerned for the centrality of Christ. He employed a unity in narrative form and gradually moved away from the high flow of ontology to theology. He relied on Gilbert Ryle and was consistently Wittgensteinian. Frei had a social and practical view of Christ's identity so that he could maintain that for descriptive purposes a person's uniqueness should not be equated with some super-added factor that was hiding in the body. In this perspective, who was Jesus Christ? He was obedient and he enacted the good. According to Springs, Frei believed the Gospel writers meant what they said and that one could therefore say that Jesus came to be who he was. Springs also spoke about Frei's view of the incarnation and resurrection.

Katherine Sonderegger paid tribute to Hans Frei as "the premier interpreter of Karl Barth of his generation and a remarkable, innovative dogmatic theologian in his own right". Sonderegger noted that Frei's intellect was different in quality; his ideas were deep, complex and fresh with a "richness and imaginative power" that could make the simple "new". While Sonderegger knew Frei years ago as an M. Div. student she is one who followed "at a distance". She finds his work technically unparalleled and both sophisticated and powerful, although she said that sometimes she is baffled concerning the force of some of his ideas and wondered where he had gotten them.

Sonderegger praised Higton's book as thoughtful and insightful indicating that he drew from a wide range of letters, unfinished manuscripts and lecture notes some of

which are provided on his own web page. But what Sonderegger said she most appreciated was that Higon's book provides a "clear eyed vision of Frei as a dedicated theologian, passionate about the truth claims and history of faith, confident in the mystery of the Lord's guidance and sovereignty over nature and humanity, and beyond all these, of Frei as a serious and exemplary reader of Holy Scripture, a true Doctor of the Sacred Page". All of this amounts to what Frei himself called a "generous orthodoxy: the truth of faith, broken open for the world".

During the course of his career, Frei wrestled with what he called "epistemological monophysitism". He used this characterization to identify what worried him in Barth's early work and in the work of H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *Faith and Ethics*. In order to overcome the weaknesses of 19th century theology (Strauss et. al.) it was important to hold together faith and history, inwardness and outer, public events in a manner similar to the Chalcedonian pattern. Sonderegger reflects on the meaning of Monophysitism in historical context (the question of whether or not Christ had one nature) and concludes that it is not all that easy to answer that question as it might appear. Both Nestorius and Cyril had their own suspicions of each other while Eutyches is the one who was labeled with the erroneous view that "the flesh of Christ was divinized in the Incarnation". Hence "there is only one nature, and that, Divine". But according to Sonderegger these easy labels do not bring us very far into the serious dogmatic conflict at the heart of the Chalcedonian debates. The Alexandrians believed Athanasius taught one nature of the Incarnate Word so that this became a favored expression of both Cyril and Severus. What they wanted to do was to emphasize that in Jesus we meet *not* a veil or mask of a deeper transcendent nature (the Word) but "just that very One, true Word, true Man". In this sense Sonderegger thinks the monophysitism offered by Severus is not a dogmatic mistake but rather serves to emphasize what later theologians would describe as the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity in history.

Stepping forward into the twentieth century Sonderegger notes that Frei worried that the early Barth (including *CD I/1*) so emphasized the revealed Word that our knowledge through nature and history is "completely stilled". In Frei's view, according to Sonderegger, "We have 'one epistemic nature' and this is the Incarnate Word. This amounts to a Eutychianism . . ." In other words we only have a divinized humanity as the source of our knowledge of God. Frei's worry was such that the incarnation seemed to mean for Barth that our humanity is so "assimilated" to Jesus' humanity "that there remains in truth only one reality, the One nature of the Incarnate Word". Hence Epistemological monophysitism is "the noetic counterpart of Christomonism, an ontological and dogmatic reductionism".

Sonderegger presents a summary of how Frei attempted to overcome the weaknesses of 19th Century academic theology by exploring the thought of Wittgenstein in an effort to offer a sort of common sense reading of the Bible which succeeded in his *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. In Sonderegger's view Frei himself embraced "a chastened and orthodox monophysitism, the epistemological and Christological monophysitism of Severus and the post-Chalcedon teachers of the Eastern Church".

In Sonderegger's view Frei should be understood as someone who tried to grasp the "co-inherence of truth and meaning, a proper and fitting doctrine of unity of Christ's person in which his historical humanity and his Divinity are firmly and truly joined". In this sense she believes Frei sought a form of Severus' Chalcedonian monophysitism as exemplified in his view of the risen identity of Jesus offered in the *Identity of Jesus Christ*. While the term identity has its problems, it is used in a unique sense by Frei so that it captures both history and worldly occurrence. Jesus moves to his passion and resurrection as a unique agent: "the unsurpassed life who cannot be substituted or set aside". "Jesus' identity is Incarnate, living Word, God with us, and in just this one case, to be is to be present in every age. In him alone, presence and identity are one, such that to know his name in thought is to confess his nearness in reality: 'Jesus lives' is an analytic proposition". In the end it is Christ's resurrection from the dead that shows us that there is only one Jesus Christ: "Out of two natures, one: the One that is simply Jesus Christ, the living Lord".

George Hunsinger noted that he had not read Higon's book fully but that he wanted to raise some questions about the ambiguity of some of the terms employed by Hans Frei such as the terms "unsubstitutability", "identity" and "uniqueness".

Hunsinger worries that Frei ends up closer to Theodore of Mopsuestia with the result that in the end he did not actually uphold the full deity of Christ and in that regard he clearly differs from Kate Sonderegger. He offers his reflections from the standpoint of Nicene orthodoxy and in that light he claims that Barth has retrieved a way of affirming the Nicene Creed and Chalcedon. While it has been argued that Cyril's party prevailed over Leo's at Chalcedon, it is nonetheless the case that all Christians accept these Councils.

Chalcedon is a narrative for Frei so that we cannot substitute statements for the narrative and we must realize that Chalcedon does not replace the narrative. Jesus was fully God and fully human but we cannot explain *how* that is the case. Higon learned that from Frei. But Hunsinger is worried about the term "epistemological monophysitism". Frei thinks that in *CD I/2* Barth does not do justice to the full humanity of

Jesus. Perhaps, Hunsinger suggests, Strauss is whispering in his ear in his attempt to think of Jesus in light of modern historical consciousness. In Hunsinger's estimation the phrase "epistemological monophysitism" is a "bone in the throat". Frei seems to have stood somewhere between H. R. Niebuhr and Karl Barth over against D. F. Strauss. Hunsinger notes that a robust affirmation of Christ's deity means that we see that his humanity is not necessary for the divine person to exist because it has no prior existence outside the Word. That indeed is the logic of Chalcedon. But "epistemological monophysitism" leads Frei away from this affirmation because he is looking at the matter from the standpoint of the knower. Hunsinger takes issue with Frei's idea that Jesus' humanity was not set forth strongly enough in the early CD.

In another remark by Frei based on a passage from H. R. Niebuhr from *Christ and Culture* he proposed a new Chalcedonianism grounded in moral and not metaphysical description. This leads Hunsinger to wonder whether or not this was a kind of fatal attraction for Frei. The problem here is that Frei wanted to defeat Strauss with his own tools. But can this be done without sacrificing the theological point at issue in the discussion. Was this the Achilles heel of his Christology? Can Strauss be defeated with his own tools that is, with a moral rather than a metaphysical Chalcedonianism. In Hunsinger's view this is a question Barth himself might raise.

Keeping in mind Strauss, historical consciousness and narrative it might be helpful to revisit the way Frei uses myth. We can see Bultmann here in the image of a mythical savior figure with Jesus imposing his identity on this. Hunsinger wonders whether or not this is the best way to describe narrative that points toward the Deity of Christ. He questions whether this is a Nicene or Chalcedonian way of seeing things. There is indeed a limit to the category of history for understanding Christ. Jesus' humanity is given priority for Frei. Is that not a danger? Does he have a robust enough affirmation of the incarnation? Is there an element of adoptionism in Frei's thought? Mike Higon says there is not. But while Hunsinger notes that Frei had a strong sense of the resurrection and providence, he hardly mentions faith. This leads Hunsinger to worry further over whether or not there is a subtle Arianism in Frei's work because he seems to think history is enough of a category to grasp Christ's full identity and this may not in fact be the case.

Finally, what about Frei's idea that God's presence is a "Christ-shaped" presence? Hunsinger contends that this cannot be a primary affirmation. Perhaps Jesus can be seen as a clue about God. But Hunsinger says no—he was God and concludes that Frei tends in an Antiochene direction. He suggests we need an Alexandrian counterweight because what makes Jesus unique is that

he is in reality more than just human. Hunsinger opposes thinking that somehow God catches up Jesus' humanity into unity with himself because that falsely suggests that he was not divine at the outset of the incarnation. In reality, Barth holds a very delicate balance by keeping together the who and the what along with the person and the history. Jesus is identical with the Word of God. He himself is our salvation in an irreversible relationship of divinity and humanity and this must be kept in mind if Barth is to be properly understood. Barth never lost the priority of the Word as that reality that gave meaning to the historical life of the human Jesus. In the end Hunsinger suspects Frei is not sufficiently Chalcedonian.

Discussion followed. Among many other things Mike Higon noted that he had fewer worries about Frei than did George Hunsinger.

What follows are two important **book reviews** written by members of the **Barth Society** for this **Newsletter**, **Mark Lindsay** of the **University of Melbourne** and **Mike Dempsey** of **St. John's University, Queens, NY**. We are grateful for the superb work they have done.

For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology. Edited by George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. vi + 214. \$36.00, £24.99.

In June 1999, the newly-established Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary played host to its inaugural conference, the topic of which has since lent its name to the volume of essays emerging from the conference and which has been published by Eerdmans. Those of us who were unable to be at the conference in person may have had to wait for five years for the publication of the essays, but the result has been well worth our patience. In part this collection of papers serves as the conference's proceedings (1). In truth, however, it is far more than that. Demonstrating just how many topics of current ecclesiastical concern can still find deep resonance within Barth's own theology, the papers presented here range across issues as diverse as Barth's attitude to natural theology, his role in combating antisemitism both within and without the Church, divine providence, and socio-political activism as a theological imperative.

John Hart's paper, with which the book opens, is in effect a summary of his acclaimed book *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936*, (Peter Lang, 2001). There is a wealth of fine scholarship here, drawn in large part from hitherto neglected archival material. What is perhaps most illuminating is Hart's realization

that the essential core of the disagreement between Barth and Brunner, which would culminate in Barth's infamous *Nein!* of 1934, was set in place by 1925 at the latest (29). Hart also reminds us, though, that while the debate over natural theology was the culmination of their long-running dispute, their argument with each other was in fact far more wide-ranging. Issues such as the essence of dialectic and its relationship to the task of theology, the role of anthropology for the (modern) theologian, and the nexus between theology and philosophy, all contributed to the gradual dissolution of the Barth-Brunner alliance. For Barth, that "God is God" is and must be "the first and most demanding word of theology" (41). From Brunner's perspective, Barth's "perennial theology" both failed and refused to address the questions set by modernity, a task that Brunner, on the other hand, sought to tackle by use of "eristics".

Daniel Migliore's response to Hart adds a number of helpful qualifiers. Is, for example, the distinction between Barth's dialectical theology and Brunner's increasingly dialogical theology as sharp as Hart seems to suggest (50)? Similarly, one would misread Barth if his theme that "God is God" was understood without regard to the explicitly trinitarian manner in which Barth expounds it. In other words, the trinitarian grammar of the object of theology means, for Barth, a thoroughgoing engagement between God and the world, and so the distinction between "God in his revelation" (Barth) and "God and the believing subject" (Brunner) is perhaps rather more complex, at least from Barth's side, than Hart's paper proposes. On the whole, however, Migliore is clearly enthused by John Hart's analysis, and the two pieces together admirably complement each other.

The second pairing of papers, from Eberhard Busch and Katherine Sonderegger, discusses the vexed question of Barth's relationship to the Jewish people. Again, both Busch and Sonderegger are drawing substantially from larger works; in Busch's case, from his *Unter dem Bogen des Einen Bundes: Karl Barth und die Juden, 1933-1945*, (Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), and in Sonderegger's from her *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). It would be fair to say both papers focus on slightly different aspects of the problem. Busch is more concerned to explore the way in which Barth established the theological basis for why the Church must stand in solidarity with the Jews during the Nazi period and, as a result of that theological foundation, must also stand against Hitler's antisemitic agenda. Sonderegger, on the other hand, while happily acknowledging Barth's moral courage and ecclesiastical leadership during the Nazi era, is rather more concerned to show why, in her view, Barth's theological "take" on Israel is notably

deficient for the task of post-Holocaust theology generally, and Jewish-Christian dialogue specifically.

These rather different foci are exemplified by the different grounds of their respective arguments. Busch's thesis concentrates on his analysis of *KD II/2* (written, of course, between the summer of 1939 and the winter of 1941-42, and in which Barth expounds his doctrine of election). Sonderegger, conversely, mentions *KD I/1* and *III/3* in passing, but is more interested in exploring the essence of post-biblical, or rabbinic, Judaism. To a certain extent, therefore, Busch and Sonderegger talk past each other. What both papers show, however, is that Barth's "theology of Israel" (if indeed he *had* one) is far more nuanced than either his critics or his admirers have often assumed. Barth's recognition during the Holocaust years of the fundamental covenantal solidarity that exists between Jews and Christians should not blind us to his caricaturized image of the "Synagogue", which makes Jewish-Christian dialogue problematic. Conversely, such deficiencies should not mask the moral and spiritual courage of his leadership during the dark days of Nazism.

The papers by Clifford Green and David Hollenbach move the collection in a more specifically political direction. Economic justice, pacifism and ecological responsibility are the three pivot-points around which Green discusses the motif of *freedom*. Green makes the crucial point that Barth's thinking was "astutely historical" (91) and that, as Hunsinger points out later in the book, Barth's vision of the Trinity binds theology to the affairs of the world. Largely for this reason, argues Green, Barth's theology is both ecclesial and public. As a logical consequence, when Barth discusses the concept of freedom, it does not degenerate into "a sort of moral laissez-faire"; rather, the freedom of which Barth speaks, and which he finds in Scripture, has specific *content* (92-93). Hollenbach seeks to give shape to this content by suggesting various ethical imperatives in relation to market economies and the possibility of "legitimate intervention across national boundaries by the international community..." (113) in defense of human rights.

Here, of course, we must recall that the conference at which these papers were delivered pre-dates 9/11 and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. While not discounting the general rightness of Hollenbach's argument, I cannot help but recall the fact that, for Barth, generalized ethical principles were not the same as the commands given by God in his freedom. Hence, of course, his highly-controversial and much misunderstood stance vis-à-vis Communism that did not, for Brunner and Niebuhr *et al*, match his opposition to Nazism. In other words, Barth's passionate defense of human life and dignity notwithstanding, I am not convinced that he would have

wished himself or his theology to be drafted into the service of George W. Bush's "war against terror".

Caroline Simon and John Webster continue this theme of ethical action in the context of Barth's concept of "neighbor". Simon quite rightly notes that Barth's theology neither yields nor even points to "a calculus for solving ethical quandaries." Ethical principles and a priori are "something less than a truly *Christian* ethic..." (145). Where I think Simon's argument is less convincing is in her suggestion that Barth's ethical praxis was inevitably compromised by his definition of "neighbor", *curvatus in se*. Unlike the example set in the 1940s by Pastor Trocmé in the French village of Le Chambon, in which the village's Reformed Christian community embraced the Jews of the village as their neighbors and then sheltered them against the Nazi occupiers, Barth's definition of neighbor privileges those who are already in the household of faith. "The foremost obligation", according to Simon's reading of Barth, "is toward the *insider*" (154).

With Simon's criticism in mind, especially insofar as she compares Barth to the allegedly much more philosemitic community of Le Chambon, her paper is perhaps best read in conjunction with Busch's. Webster also, however, reminds us that there is a deeply christological aspect to the structure of Barth's anthropology and ethics that Simon overlooks. In Christ, each individual, both inside and outside the circle of faith, "can be my neighbor" (161), by virtue of the christological teleology of humanity. That everyone with whom we come into contact can be my neighbor is "nothing other than a matter of affirming the other's teleology, to treat the other as *what he or she already is in Christ*" (163). Thus, says Webster, "the Trocmé and Barth models may not be so far apart after all..." (162).

The last two pairs of papers, from Caroline Schröder and Randall Zachmann, and George Hunsinger and Brian Leftow, explore the themes of divine providence and the trinitarian ground of eternity respectively. Schröder provides a detailed overview of Barth's explication of the doctrine of *de providentia*, from *KD* III/3. Hers is a fairly straight-forward analysis, although one that charges Barth with a degree of "spiritual arrogance" (134). In her view, Barth's connection between providence and election implies a necessary superiority of the elect over and above the non-elect. Quite appropriately, Schröder tries to draw out the pastoral implications of such superiority and find ways in which it can be thwarted, or at least mitigated. Randall Zachmann, on the other hand, suggests that Schröder has made the distinction between the elect and the non-elect—and of course their respective abilities to perceive the providential rule of God in the events of world-occurrence—sharper than it needs to be. The doctrine of election, as Barth proposes

it, is as universal as it can be, and neither believing nor disbelieving in providence can restrict the universality of election's reach. Thus, if faith in election ever becomes "inwardly directed" or tempts us to be spiritually superior, we have lost the core of Barth's argument (138).

Finally, George Hunsinger and Brian Leftow take the volume to what may at first appear to be stratospheric heights. Their conversation about the relationship between time and eternity is of a vastly different nature to the rest of the papers which, by and large, are grounded in the concrete realities of real people and real issues, even when discussing concepts such as providence and freedom. It is tempting to regard this final pair of papers as so theoretical as to have little bearing on current ecclesial concerns. I think it would be a mistake to regard it in such a way. The question with which Hunsinger and Leftow deal gets to the core of how the Church understands God's very being and how Christians believe God to be present and active in time. Hunsinger notes, for example, that Barth's "conception of eternity does not fit neatly into either of [the two] standard views" (168). By exploring Barth's doctrine of God (particularly *KD* II/1), Hunsinger goes on to show that there is a "temporality of eternity..." Time, he says, exists within "eternity's embrace" (186). Far from being (merely) wholly Other, God "can and does have time for us" (181). This is hardly a theoretical matter. As many of the other papers show, it was precisely because of Barth's conviction that the trinitarian ground of theology binds God to the affairs of the world that he had (and still has) so much to say about the socio-political and economic questions of the day. Thus, if God in his eternity has time for us, then it is similarly incumbent upon the Church to keep addressing these questions. Perhaps this is ingredient to any future that ecclesial theology may have.

The collection ends with a set of vivid reminiscences of Barth as a teacher, by one of his former pupils, John Godsey. Through Godsey, we get a glimpse of the Barthian wit that went so much hand-in-hand with his wisdom. As the recollections of a student, Godsey's contribution is a particularly apt way to close the book. His memories, as well as the rest of the papers that have been brought together in this volume, provide ample illustration—for those for whom this may be in doubt!—that Barth's theological legacy remains intact, and that Barth himself continues to be "a teacher to the teachers of the church" (17).

Mark R. Lindsay

*Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian
Relations, Cambridge
Dept. of History, University of Melbourne*

Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period. By Richard E. Burnett. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. ix + 312. \$45.00.

Originally written as a doctoral dissertation under Bruce McCormack, this carefully crafted and thoroughly researched work offers a seminal introduction to the hermeneutical principles of Karl Barth's theological exegesis during the *Römerbrief* period. Taking its cue from Hans-Georg Gadamer's observation that Barth's *Römerbrief* represented a "hermeneutical manifesto" that challenged the reigning hegemony of the liberal tradition of interpretation of Schleiermacher, this book painstakingly works through the previously unpublished six preface drafts of the first edition of the *Römerbrief* (translated in English in the Appendix) to argue that an important part of Barth's break with liberalism came from recognizing the failures of the empathic tradition of hermeneutics to deal with the unique subject matter of holy scripture: God.

The book is divided into seven chapters. After an introductory chapter explaining the need for an English appraisal of Barth's hermeneutics, the second chapter explores the context behind Barth's break with liberalism while the remainder of the work outlines the hermeneutical principles revealed in the preface drafts. Each of these chapters offers superb analyses of Barth's hermeneutics in the *Römerbrief* and other early writings. They also include several fine discussions of Barth's most vocal critics in Germany at that time (Wernle, Schlatter, Jülicher) as well as informative expositions of the leading proponents of liberal hermeneutics (Herder, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Troeltsch, Wobbermin, and others). These contributions alone make this work an important study on the context that shaped Barth's theological revolution. Most importantly, Burnett sheds much needed light on Barth's hermeneutical principles and corrects the misperception that Barth's hermeneutics was an *ad hoc*, virtuoso performance that could be neither taught nor replicated (Childs). He also clearly demonstrates that Barth had an acute grasp of the hermeneutical problems of Schleiermacher and had formulated his own alternative as early as 1918.

Chapter two begins by noting Barth's telling reflection on the raging hermeneutical debate when he visited Princeton Theological Seminary in 1962:

[M]ore and more people speak of hermeneutics...They are discussing the question of language, of translation, of application, and so on. I have always preferred to do the thing, to try to explain, to understand texts...and they are fighting on

this methodological basis...they are thinking round and round, how do we understand instead of trying to understand and then make a jump in the water to see if they are able to swim (13).

Always more interested in interpreting a text than in discussing methods or theories about *how* to interpret it, the chapter goes on to show Barth's preference throughout his career for exegesis over hermeneutics, content over method.

Yet, as Burnett argues, the heart of Barth's break with the empathic tradition came not from an intellectual or personal preference for exegesis over hermeneutics, but from returning to scripture and realizing the profound but simple truth that the being and actuality of God precede all human inquiry. Barth learned that "no method or hermeneutic could be set up in advance to understand this reality adequately" (42). Any attempt to understand the being of God on the basis of a general method or anthropology that allowed privileged access to God on a priori grounds is illegitimate for Barth, as it would "*ipso facto*...deny the freedom of God's being" which alone grants understanding. Hence, according to Burnett, the basis of Barth's hermeneutical discovery was that "no method is adequate—not a dogmatic, not a critical, nor even a dialectical method—unless God speaks, unless it is God Himself who speaks when He is spoken of" (42).

One of the great contributions that this book has to make to the field of hermeneutics is its presentation of Barth's critique of Schleiermacher's universal theory of hermeneutics. According to Burnett, Barth immediately recognized the dangers of grounding a theory of interpretation in one's ability to empathize with another, for such a theory rests on a universal common core of humanity, on "the assumption that each person contains a minimum of everyone else" (155, 186). For Barth, this is theologically disastrous, not only because it limits understanding of another to one's self-understanding and ability to empathize, that is, it is based on a "comparison with oneself" (187), but also because human beings cannot empathize or identify with a subject matter that is "*totaliter aliter*" (190). In short, as Burnett argues, Barth realized early on that the "wholesale anthropologization of theology" since Schleiermacher in which "man increasingly became the subject of theology and God his predicate" (39) had, in reality, very little to do with God or the text of scripture, and everything to do with the psychological point of contact and intuitible common core between the reader and the author.

Yet Barth's insistence on a special hermeneutic designed for the unique subject matter of theology does not preclude the possibility of a general or universal hermeneutic. On the contrary, Barth's hermeneutical

principles make an outstanding contribution toward interpreting any text in a way that does not fall prey to the totalitarian and universalizing tendencies of a general hermeneutic. The main difference, of course, from a theological perspective, is that theological knowledge is *determined* by its subject matter ("in the School of the Holy Spirit") and it is precisely this knowledge which enables one to read and judge other texts in light of the revelation of God in scripture.

Perhaps the most illuminating hermeneutical principle from the preface drafts to Romans I is Barth's insistence to read the Bible "in a way that is *sachlicher, inhaltlicher, wesentlicher*," that is, "more in accordance with its subject matter, content, and substance" (65). In response to empathic tradition of Schleiermacher and its famous dictum to understand the author better than he understands himself, chapter three treats Barth's critique of this tradition as more interested in the author's personality, history, and psychology than the subject matter itself. While Schleiermacher's universal theory of hermeneutics might appear to be a loving and empathic attempt toward understanding, for Barth, it actually lacks love and empathy because it does not take an author's main theme, content, and subject matter seriously. Hence, if scripture is going to be read according to its main theme, content, and subject matter, more attention and care must be given to understand the subject matter of the biblical text and the meaning of the Bible as a whole. Unfortunately, as Burnett points out, most modern exegesis has been more interested in interpreting the parts of scripture in and of themselves, while remaining ignorant of the Bible's meaning as a whole. For Barth, however, the entire meaning of scripture is not attained by elevating one part or another as the *Hauptsache* of the whole and interpreting all other parts accordingly. Rather, the meaning of the Bible as a whole is given by God in the dynamic relationship between God and God's creatures. Thus it is not the parts which constitute the whole for Barth, as Burnett argues, but the concrete and actual relationship which gives meaning to the parts. In this sense, then, Barth admits to an "emergency clause" in which it *is* possible for the reader to understand the subject matter better than the author himself. Since God alone provides understanding, any interpretation that accurately reflects its main content will not come from a special method or hermeneutical principle, but from the voice of the living God, thus leaving a crucial role for the doctrine of inspiration in Barth's understanding of scripture.

The remaining chapters offer further elaboration of Barth's hermeneutical principles in terms of active participation, loving trust, faithfulness, and openness to the truth-content and subject matter of the text. Here Burnett offers outstanding analyses of Barth's critique of the historical critical method, which understands

scientific objectivity in terms of neutral and detached observation. According to Barth, however, if one is truly to understand a text and take the author's thoughts "at least as seriously as one takes one's own" (196), then, what is needed is not distance and detachment, but more active participation with the subject matter and more attention and love to what the author attempts to communicate. This fundamental hermeneutical principle thus depends upon "maintaining a relationship of trust or faithfulness" (194) to both the subject matter and the text that is not enhanced by approaching the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion or mistrust. Instead, it is necessary to have an open and receptive attitude toward learning something one did not previously know, to relinquish control, surrender to the mysterious subject matter, and make a concerted effort to stand *with* an author and not over or against him. This, unfortunately, is precisely what has been overlooked by the dominant trend in biblical scholarship, as Barth succinctly summarizes in one of the preface drafts:

today's theology does not stand with the prophets and apostles; it does not side with them but rather with the modern reader and his prejudices; it does not take the prophets and apostles in earnest, but while it stands smiling sympathetically beside them or above them, it takes a cool and indifferent distance from them; it critically or merrily examines the historical-psychological surface and misses its meaning. That is what I have against it (125-6).

Despite Barth's well-known opposition to a one-sided method of historical criticism, Burnett admirably illustrates the positive role historical criticism should play in biblical exegesis for Barth. Most importantly, historical research plays a vital preparatory role in helping the reader understand the text by appreciating its historical context. What Barth objects to in historical criticism is not that it is too critical, but that it is not critical enough of its own presuppositions (i.e., the presupposition of a presuppositionless interpretation). Indeed, in one of the most radical statements of Barth's preface drafts which, according to Burnett, Barth defended throughout his career (*CD* I.1, 106), there is no exegesis without eisegesis: "Whoever does not continually 'read in' because he participates in the subject matter, cannot 'read out' either" (113). Yet in making this controversial claim, Barth was not advocating eisegesis as the goal of interpretation. He was simply stating a fact and alerting his reader to the danger that "our supposed listening is in truth a strange mixture of hearing and our own speaking, and, in accordance with the usual rule, it is most likely that our own speaking will be the really decisive event" (113

cited from *CD I.2*, 470). Hence, to avoid reading a text as though our interpretation were free from presuppositions, as in much modern biblical interpretation, Barth advocates for an awareness of the constant temptation to impose one's own meaning on the text, while recognizing that the real meaning must always come from God. Paraphrasing Barth, Burnett states that "despite all our hermeneutical devices to make a text speak...there are occasions when...we find *ourselves* really gripped, subdued, and mastered by a text's subject matter..." (113). In this specific sense, then, one may be enabled not only to understand the material better than its author, but also to become so close to the text and its ideas that one *almost* forgets one is not the author. Here, Barth clearly positions himself in the trajectory of the empathic tradition, while offering a radical re-interpretation (*Aufhebung*) in terms of active and faithful participation in the subject matter. Hence, while the interpretation of scripture requires the insights of historical criticism, exegesis, and even the inevitable temptation of eisegesis, the decisive event is the divine decision toward the interpreter, which clearly shows that spiritual interpretation lies near the very heart of Barth's approach to scripture.

Burnett touches on the crucial issue of spiritual interpretation several times in this work. Yet, in this reader's opinion more attention and love could have been given (by Barth *and* Burnett!) toward explicating the relationship and potential complications between historical research and scientific, spiritual interpretation. It is not enough to repeatedly state that since the being and actuality of God precede all human questioning, there is no genuine interpretation apart from the Holy Spirit, yet persist in a manner and tone that would seem to preclude or tone down the need for such readings of scripture and proclamation. While Burnett points out that Barth never denied spiritual or pneumatic exegesis, Barth does deny that his approach has anything to do with "enthusiasm" (259) which would overcome the distance between reader and subject matter. Further attention to the distinction between pneumatic and enthusiastic exegesis would be helpful. Moreover, if genuine interpretation comes from God and includes some measure of eisegesis, one wonders whether Barth's hermeneutical principles can produce results that are genuinely repeatable as Burnett seems to suggest. Although Burnett offers an outstanding defense of Barth from the charge of *ad hoc*, virtuoso hermeneutics by demonstrating his early and consistent use of exegetical principles, he never explains the problems with such an approach or with those who espouse such view (e.g., Francis Young).

Aside from the important, if thorny, issue of spiritual and historical interpretation and some frequent repetition of the argument, this work offers an unparalleled English interpretation of Barth's early

hermeneutics and critique of the leading proponents of empathetic hermeneutics and historical criticism in Germany at that time. For those interested in the hermeneutical debate surrounding Barth's break with liberalism, this book should quickly become a standard in the field. It is also highly recommended for anybody interested in learning more about hermeneutics and the important contribution Karl Barth has to make. It is clearly written, cogently and meticulously argued, and eminently readable for students and specialists alike. In fact, while the frequent repetition may prove a bit tedious and unnecessary for the expert, it will likely add clarity and precision for the student. Finally, since so much of the argument depends on Burnett's careful exegesis of the preface drafts, one might well benefit from a close reading of these, contained in the Appendix, before tackling the main text.

Michael T. Dempsey
St. John's University,
Queens, New York

The Gospel of Justification in Christ: Where Does the Church Stand Today? Wayne C. Stumme, Editor (Eerdmans, 2006) is due out in March, 2006. Contributors include: Gary Dorrien, Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., Gabriel Fackre, George Hunsinger, Paul Varo Martinson, Margaret O'Gara, Steven D. Paulson, Michael Root, Caroline J. Simon, Katherine Sonderegger, Wayne C. Stumme and Michael E. Tassler.

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